

Basic Detail Report



Forehead Mask

Date

1840-1870

Primary Maker

Coast Tsimshian or Tlingit

Medium

Alder, abalone shell, baleen bristles, paint

Description

This small forehead mask with its short, rounded ears suggests the image of a bear, but it could also be interpreted as a wolf. It may have been used as either a crest headdress on ceremonial occasions or as a dancing mask in firelit dramatizations in the tribal houses. The iridescent shine of large abalone inlays in the eyes would have been highlighted by the flames of the fire. Thin baleen bristles extend up and back from the rear of the head. Eagle down may have clung to the baleen bristles to heighten its dramatic appearance. The thin-lipped mouth encloses carved square teeth and small canines. Originally painted green, black, and red, the colors of this forehead mask have been altered over time. The green was overpainted with black, and this has been scraped off, leaving a more muted green surface. An older, duller shade of red was touched up with a brighter hue, perhaps of vermilion. The back of the mask has an integral wooden extension with several drilled holes, where once were attached the wearing harness and body coverings. These coverings sometimes took the form of tanned leather capes, with the animal's body features painted in formline designs on the surface. Other masks have employed shredded red cedar bark or, in the late 19th century, cotton cloth draperies to hide the dancer's body.

Dimensions

Overall: 5 1/2 × 6 3/4 × 9 1/2 in. (14 × 17.1 × 24.1 cm)